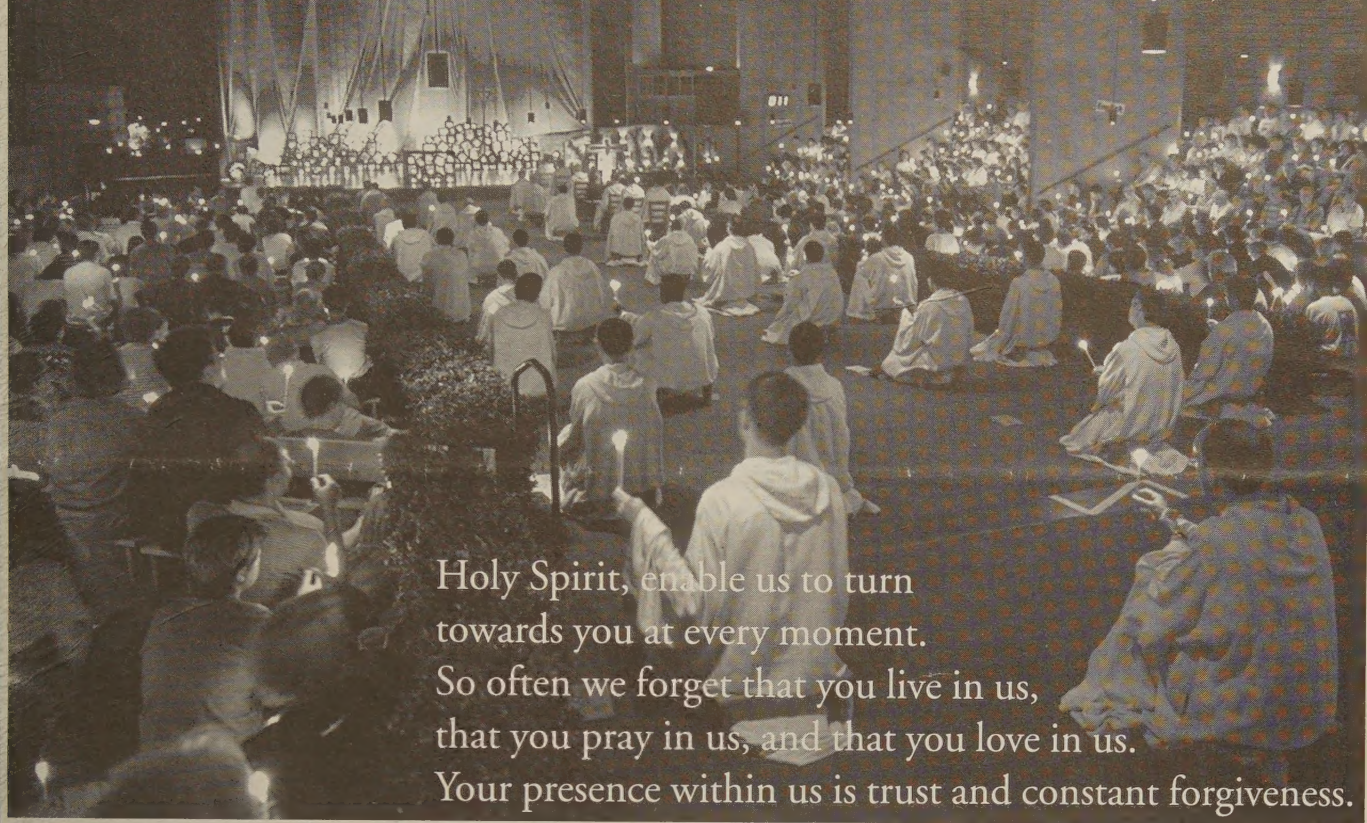


Letter from Taizé

June - July 2004 Bimonthly 0,50 Euro 3



Holy Spirit, enable us to turn
towards you at every moment.
So often we forget that you live in us,
that you pray in us, and that you love in us.
Your presence within us is trust and constant forgiveness.

EASTER IN TAIZÉ

Prayer by Brother Roger of Taizé

PROCESSED

JUN 01 2004

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Cristo ressuscitou! Christ is risen!

More than other years, the presence of young Portuguese had an impact this Easter in Taizé. Several hundred made the trip and were able to communicate their enthusiasm and their joy regarding **the meeting to be held in Lisbon at the end of the year**. Other young people also came from far away, from Romania, from Serbia, and from many other lands.

Throughout the weeks of April, more than 10,000 young people came to the hill. Times of prayer alternated with topics for reflection and Bible study. Most of the topics will be taken up during the entire year. They deal with this year's Letter, *To the Wellsprings of Joy*, the story of the pilgrims to Emmaus ("How does God come close to us?"), and the first part of the Book of Genesis ("Created in the image of God").

One of the high points was the life-commitment of a brother from India on the eve of Easter. Committing one's entire life to follow the risen Christ: what clearer sign could there be of trust in his presence?

A group came from French Guyana. These young people are French, but live in the part of France that is overseas, in Latin America, north of Brazil. One afternoon they led a workshop entitled

"When Europe, Africa and America meet in the same land..." Before coming to Taizé, they visited different historical communities in Guyana to learn traditional dances, and they borrowed their costumes. These young people talked about their different commitments in their local communities—with children, in religious instruction, in the liturgy. How can the Church serve the cause of unity when peoples are so different?

Ten, twenty or thirty hours on the road, or even more? Who would not hesitate before undertaking such an adventure? What do the Portuguese propose that makes such an effort worthwhile?



AT THE END OF THIS YEAR

In Lisbon

When you see where Lisbon is located on the map, at the westernmost point of the European continent and not far from the southernmost point, you are led to look beyond and, by an effort of imagination, to see that city not as the furthest point, but as a starting-point: what is this Europe that begins here? How does it look to those who arrive from this side? And then, following this, you can see Lisbon as the point where the ocean begins: further south, further west, further north there is only the sea and the invitation to set out on a voyage of discovery. At a time when Europe is expanding as a political entity, we are invited to reflect on its place in the world and on its image in the eyes of the peoples of other continents.

In the history of Europe, the Portuguese were the first to dare to cross the oceans to discover new routes. They set out without knowing what lay in wait for them, with the desire to shorten distances, to discover how the world was made, to make contacts, sometimes for trade, sometimes for cultural or religious motives, sometimes to conquer. They crossed the earth, from Africa to China, via America. It was the beginning of the modern world with its aspiration to universality. The longing that nothing or nobody be a foreigner, be excluded!

Today, they are inviting many to join them, to dare to set out on the routes of Europe, on well-known roads but ones

that need to be rediscovered over and over again. Those who meet in Lisbon will be able to have the adventure, in their turn, of better understanding our world, where it is not geography that has to be discovered, but cultural transformations and relations between peoples. How else can trust be built up? The risk is no longer that of crossing the ocean with only the aid of a compass; today we are confronted with roads of understanding, of exclusion, of violence, of the struggle to reduce poverty.

The Portuguese were also able to bring the joy of the Gospel to different continents, to widen the communion of the Church to include peoples of Africa, America and Asia. They will inspire us and be with us in our search, as part of the pilgrimage of trust on earth, so that many may discover in Lisbon how to be witnesses to communion in Christ and to openness to others in their own situations.

Seed of a New Sharing

The cardinal-patriarch of Lisbon was the first to announce the meeting to be held at the end of the year in a letter to his diocese:

"It will be one more stage in this long 'pilgrimage of trust across the world' that has created a dialogue of commu-

nion between many thousands of young people from throughout Europe, in the principal European cities. In a world threatened by violence, a world that is searching for the light that will give a new meaning to its future, it is important that young people become pilgrims of hope. They will come to pray with those who want to pray with them, to share joy with those who want to open their hearts to the wealth of others, so often expressed in their differences. They want to be the seed of a new sharing between the peoples of the earth. As the primary inspiration of these meetings, there is the conviction of faith that prayer is a force that fertilizes history and that there will be a more just and fraternal society only if all commit themselves generously to build it. (...) Young people of Lisbon! Welcome those who come from throughout Europe, your brothers and sisters; share your hope with them; leave indifference behind; discover an ideal; be witnesses to joy."

Many Smiles Will Say: Welcome!

Reacting to this announcement, Antonio Marujo, a journalist, married and the father of two children, wrote:

"The European meeting at the end of the year in Lisbon is creating a great ex-

Holy Spirit, you cause a life of communion with God to develop in each one of us. In this life, kind-heartedness and forgetting oneself for the sake of others come to fruition.

4 SUN Jesus sent out his disciples saying: "Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say, 'The kingdom of God is very near you.'"

5 MON Since the Spirit is our life, let our actions be guided by the Spirit.

6 TUE I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord and of the many good things he has done for his people in his mercy.

7 WED God's Word is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

8 THU Let us love, since God loved us first. Anyone who does not love the brother or sister they see cannot love God whom they do not see.

9 FRI Jesus said: The greatest among you will be your servant.

10 SAT Jesus said to his disciples: Let us go elsewhere — to the nearby villages — so that I can proclaim the message there too.

3 SAT St THOMAS Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied, "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

11 SUN Having told the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked, "Who showed themselves to be a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" They answered him, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

12 MON Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

13 TUE Paul said: Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, who said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."

14 WED Eli told the child Samuel: If you are called again, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

15 THU Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

16 FRI Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins.

17 SAT The Risen Christ said to Mary of Magdala: Go and find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.

18 SUN God has wanted to reveal to the nations the splendid riches of the mystery which is Christ in you.

19 MON Jesus said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.

20 TUE The Lord says: You are precious in my eyes, I value you and I love you.

21 WED Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me.

22 THU The Word became flesh and lived among us. From God's fullness we have all received.

23 FRI Jesus said: Whoever makes themselves humble like a child is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me.

24 SAT Peter writes: Love one another deeply, from the heart.

25 SUN Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

26 MON "Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

27 TUE Jesus said: Give, and it will be given to you. A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure used for you.

28 WED Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; they hide it again, and in their joy sell everything they have and buy that field.

29 THU Make the Lord your joy: God will give you even more than your heart's desire.

30 FRI God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

31 SAT The Lord says: I desire faithful love, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JULY

1 **SUN** Lk 12:13-21 Jesus said: Be on your guard against every kind of greed; for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions.

2 **Mon** Jr 29:11-14 The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans not for disaster but for peace, to give you a future and a hope.

3 **Tue** 1 Jn 4:16-19 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

4 **Wed** 1 P 3:8-17 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Instead, repay with a blessing, for to this you were called.

5 **Thu** Jn 10:11-15 Jesus said: I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

6 **Fri** TRANSFIGURATION 2 Co 3:16-18 Paul writes: All of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory.

7 **Sat** Lk 17:20-21 Jesus said: The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, for the kingdom of God is among you.

8 **SUN** Lk 12:32-48 Jesus said: Be like people waiting for their master to return, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.

9 **Mon** Ps 86 Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart that I may revere you.

10 **Tue** 1 Jn 1:1-7 God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, we are in communion with one another.

11 **Wed** 1 Jn 3:16-24 We can reassure our hearts before God, whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

12 **Thu** Mt 7:24-27 Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like someone who built their house on rock.

13 **Fri** Jn 12:23-26 Jesus said: Anyone who is too attached to their own life will lose it, while anyone who is not attached to their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

14 **Sat** Jn 8:12 Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life.

15 **SUN** Lk 1:39-56 THE VIRGIN MARY Mary said: The Lord has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty-handed.

16 **Mon** Jn 14:22-26 Jesus said: Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

17 **Tue** Is 58:6-8 If you break unjust chains to let the oppressed go free, if you share your food with the hungry and shelter the homeless, then your light will break forth like the dawn and your wound will be quickly healed.

18 **Wed** Mk 10:17-22 Jesus said to a young person: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

19 **Thu** Is 11:1-9 Isaiah said: On that day there shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

20 **Fri** Is 55:6-11 Turn to God who will forgive freely. For, thus says the Lord, my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.

21 **Sat** Jn 14:15-21 Jesus said: I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor who will stay with you for ever — the Spirit of truth.

22 **SUN** Is 66:18-21 The Lord says: I am coming to gather the people of every nation and language, and they will see my glory.

23 **Mon** Ph 4:4-7 Do not let anything worry you, but in every situation, by prayer with thanksgiving, let God know your desires.

24 **Tue** Rm 13:8-10 All the commandments can be summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself.

25 **Wed** Mt 16:21-27 Jesus said: Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever risks their life for my sake will find it.

26 **Thu** Zp 3:14-18a Your God is with you. God will quiet you with his love and dance with joy for you.

27 **Fri** Rm 8:26-27 We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

28 **Sat** Ac 2:42-47 All the believers held everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared the proceeds according to the needs of each person.

29 **SUN** Lk 14:1-14 Jesus said: When you have a dinner, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, and you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you.

30 **Mon** Jn 12:47-50 Jesus said: I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.

31 **Tue** 1 P 4:7-11 Peter writes: Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over many a sin.

God of mercy, you illuminate our souls with unexpected light. And then we discover that, although in each of us there may be a portion of darkness, in each person there is above all the mystery of your presence.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

pectation in many Portuguese Christians. Holding this meeting in the Portuguese capital is a challenge for a country in transition. Portugal, traditionally a Catholic country, has opened itself up to diversity these last few years. The country has become more modern by becoming part of the European Union, but is still dealing with serious social problems. In the 1960s a land of emigration, today it has also become a land of welcome for many Africans, Brazilians and Eastern Europeans.

"Holding the meeting in Lisbon will be an intense moment of questioning for Portuguese Christians. The current challenge in pastoral work is to make the link between more traditional expressions of faith, religious instruction, liturgy and good works, and the attempts at renewal by small Christian groups and in parishes. There is a desire to pray together, to reflect on what it means to be Christian today in a society that offers so many challenges, to intervene in the concrete problems of the country in a way that witnesses to faith in Christ.

"After years of euphoria, Portugal today is experiencing a crisis of confidence. Unemployment is on the rise: more than 400,000 people are without work (almost 10% of the active population). Hunger and extreme poverty have not been eradicated (at least 200,000 people can eat each day only with the help of organizations of solidarity). Education and science are not yet decisive factors of development. Portugal was able to organize the World Expo in 1998 and in June will host the European soccer championship, but the country has lost a lot of its self-confidence. Thirty years after the nonviolent revolution that restored democracy, the country is doing better but still has a long way to go.

"One of the positive aspects of contemporary Portuguese society is the will to offer hospitality and to integrate immigrants from the former African colonies, from Brazil, from Ukraine and other countries of Eastern Europe. The European meeting will help us better to recognize and more deeply to understand the value of others—whether they come from different countries, cultures or religious traditions.

"This stage of the pilgrimage of trust bears a hope with it: that each participant may find, in his or her heart, the joy that springs from the Risen Lord. In Lisbon many smiles will say: 'Welcome!'"

Living Parishes

Francisco, from a parish of Oeiras, a suburb of Lisbon, writes:

"The bishop of Lisbon has invited the Christians of his diocese this year to reflect on the way the 'good news' can be

proclaimed in an urban environment, where the rhythm of life has become much more rapid. The parish remains relevant to people's life; the municipal district corresponds exactly to the parish boundaries. But during the last census, although 86% of the population of Lisbon declared themselves to be Catholic, only 10% said that they went to church regularly. Faith is starting to be seen as a personal choice, made in total freedom, and less as a sociological category.

"There are perhaps fewer communities, but they remain full of vitality. Young people are present in the life of the Church. In almost all the parishes, there are groups of sharing and prayer. Young people take on responsibilities for the religious instruction of children, for helping with the liturgy, for works of charity. At the end of the 1980s, because there were groups that felt isolated, the diocesan youth ministry began to ensure an ongoing formation of animators. In the course of nine weekend meetings spread out over three years, the Church offers them a course which, more than just teaching them to lead groups, helps them to develop their human and spiritual gifts. Among other things, the European meeting will provide an opportunity for the different parish groups of all ages, who sometimes are not really acquainted with one another, to work together. And it will force the parishes to open themselves and to go towards the people of the district to announce the 'good news' that, if they have two square meters of floor space in their living-room, they will be lucky enough to welcome a young person whom they do not know but who will be absolutely fantastic."

Discovering the Beauty of Sharing

Manuel:

"I come from a small town in the interior of Portugal. Where I come from, unlike other regions of my country, young people are not very present in the parish. Almost everyone is baptized, and a good number have taken part in the first years of religious instruction, but not many have been confirmed and very few go to church more than three or four times a year. In this context, what can a European meeting in Lisbon give us? Probably the results will be much more than we can hope for now...

"If young people stop going to church, it is not because they are against what takes place there. Many say, 'I don't feel anything, so why should I go?' 'It's always the same thing; it's boring!' 'When I go, I spend the whole time

looking at my watch... it's more honest not to go.' But many will be attracted by a meeting not far from us that wants to bring together tens of thousands of people their own age, from many different countries. Some will go to Lisbon out of simple curiosity: 'Is it possible that so many young people give up their holidays to spend five days praying and sharing with others?' Others will be interested to get to know young people who are ready to travel several days by bus to come and share their faith. Others would certainly like to share their vision of today's world, with many points of hope but also many unanswered questions. Many will come because they are looking for an accessible prayer, uncluttered and without formalities, simple and profound, joyful and serene, common and personal. We are looking for happiness. A European meeting can help us to understand that happiness is possible with very little: a heart open to others and to God can fill us with joy!

"Beginning at the end of the summer, we will start taking practical initiatives to prepare the trip to Lisbon. Such a captivating and specific event will surely help us to widen the boundaries of our small parish youth-group. We can also invite many others to share our regular prayer, in communion with so many who, across Europe, are getting ready to come to Lisbon. We can organize small activities to earn some money, so that no one is forced not to attend the meeting for financial reasons. And that will be very easy this year.

"If a European meeting enables us to discover the beauty of communion and sharing, that discovery requires us to take concrete and simple initiatives in our own situation. And the preparation can already be an anticipation of the meeting itself. Perhaps we can try to go and visit people who are lonely. Here there are many elderly people who live alone, who would like to have someone to talk to. Perhaps we can resume an old project to send scholastic material to Portuguese-speaking countries that need it: São Tomé, Timor, Mozambique... And we already have many other ideas that we will need to work out during the summer.

"I am sure that young people from the entire country will feel a certain responsibility for this meeting. It is a great opportunity to give a witness: young people are ready to navigate across vast seas of indifference, and sometimes even of adversity, to discover Another who is waiting for us. No with the material power of the *conquistadores* of the sixteenth century, but inspired by poor fishermen who became pilgrims for the sake of the Gospel."

Why did an instrument of death become the symbol of Christianity?

Can the sufferings of an innocent person save us?

Death is the greatest enigma of the human condition. All we have built up for years and years, all that is beautiful in human life, seems to go up in smoke in the space of a moment. And then, at the very centre of the Christian faith, we find the symbol of a violent death.

In fact, from the beginning, death has never been at the centre of the Gospel. Faith begins with the proclamation of a Life more powerful than death: "He is risen!" It is in the light of the resurrection that death takes its place in the Christian scheme of things.

Contemplated in this light, death changes its significance. Without confidence in a Life greater than death, human beings remain paralyzed by fear, frozen on the edge of an abyss that they dare not face directly. But by consenting to give his life for love because he was borne by the certainty of an unbreakable communion with his Father, Christ took from death its "sting" (1 Corinthians 15:55), the fear of nothingness: "by dying he freed all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

In the company of Christ, then, dying can become a language able to express the total gift of self. By his existence, Jesus taught us "the law of the wheat grain": "Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). This "law" applies not only to physical death. It tells us rather that the road to Life inevitably involves a letting go, a refusal to cling at all costs to what we have achieved in order to journey with God towards what lies ahead of us and what is beyond all our hopes. We bear within us a life-giving seed that remains and blossoms in spite of everything.

In this sense, the first "death" we experience is our birth, when we leave behind the haven of our mother's womb to confront the harsh realities of existence. Then, in the history of salvation, we have the example of Abraham, called to leave the world he knows to set out on an adventure with the Lord (see Genesis 12:1-4). Later on, we find the example of the people of Israel, required to pass through the wilderness with its inevitable trials to reach the Promised Land. The cross is thus the total revelation of the true movement of life: "Whoever tries to preserve their life will lose it, and who loses it will keep it safe" (Luke 17:33).

Paradoxically, then, true death, in the negative sense of the term, is the refusal to risk one's life with God. Those who wish to "preserve" or "save" their life at all costs, those who cling to what they already possess, are in danger of understanding nothing about authentic life. The cross of Christ reveals a way of dying that does not contradict the logic of life. In Christ's company we realize that cross and resurrection are the two sides, the dark side and the bright side, of one and the same Love, of one and the same Life.

A recent film poses this question in a dramatic way. We know that Jesus died an atrocious death. Crucifixion was one of the worst tortures of the ancient world as well as, for the Jews, a sign of God's rejection (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). The New Testament, however, views the cross not as a failure or a condemnation, but as the instrument of our salvation (e.g. Galatians 6:14; Colossians 1:20). It is not surprising that people have always found it hard to understand how such a horrible event could have such positive consequences.

In fact, this incomprehension is rooted in a misunderstanding that needs to be brought clearly to light. For centuries, this misunderstanding has had devastating effects and has resulted in many people being unable to believe in Christ. It consists in the notion that Jesus' suffering as such has salvific value. In other words, God the Father required this suffering, which implies that in him there is in some sense a complicity with the violence done to his only Son.

It is almost enough to formulate this thesis clearly to realize that it is not only false, but a blasphemy. If God does not wish even the wicked to suffer and die (Ezekiel 33:11), how could he take pleasure in the destruction of his beloved Son, the most innocent of all? On the contrary, we need to repeat over and over again that suffering in itself has no value in God's eyes. Still more, to the extent that they damage what is living, pain and distress are in flagrant contradiction with a good God who wants the fullness of life for all (John 10:10).

Where does this misunderstanding come from, then? Among other things, from an overly superficial reading of biblical texts which are in fact shortcuts. This reading ignores the middle term, which is love. Only love can give life; only love can save us. If suffering has no value in itself, being more often than not destructive, there are times when, to keep on loving faithfully, we are led to accept incomprehensible suffering. The New Testament texts that seem to exalt suffering in reality celebrate the love of God which goes to the point of the total gift of self in favor of the loved one. Saint John reminds us of this in no uncertain terms when he writes, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for those one loves" (John 15:13).

In the phrase "Christ suffered for you" (1 Peter 2:21), for example, it is the "for you" that expresses the middle term, the presence of love. In his Son, God espoused the human condition to the point of taking the last place out of love; the cross is thus the expression of an absolute solidarity (see Philippians 2:6-8). And when Saint Paul writes that he shares the sufferings of Christ (e.g. 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24), he is expressing his desire, in the steps of Christ, to give himself for others without holding anything back. Because Christ took upon himself the sufferings of our condition for love, these sufferings can be lived not as a punishment that we deserve or a blind and absurd destiny, but as an encounter with Love and a road to Life.

In a dark period in the history of his people, God became present through his prophet Isaiah. The message of the Book of Consolation (Isaiah chapters 40 – 55) is clear: although the nation is in exile and feels abandoned, God is listening and responds to their prayer by sending a prophet to announce that the end of their misfortune is near.

The announcement begins with the word "comfort," not just once but twice. God is not against his people, as their suffering might lead us to believe. On the contrary, we are his people (40:1) and God does not want human distress. He does not use suffering to win over his people, but he wants to open a road of life for them by giving them a future.

For this message to be rooted in our life, it has to "speak to the heart" (40:2) which is not just the seat of feelings but also of intellectual ability and of the will. The heart of a person is affected by the wounds they have received in the course of their life. These wounds can lead us to withdraw into ourselves. But God can make something unexpected spring up from our wounds, as long as we keep our hearts open to welcome a word that comes from him: "The word of God will last forever" (40:8).

God's word comes to transform our life. It gives us the inner strength to find new vitality. "Prepare in the wilderness the way of the Lord" (40:3). Just as God's people had to let themselves be led through the desert to enter the Promised Land and then experienced a new liberation by returning from their exile in Babylon to build a new future, we too must constantly cross over from discouragement to hope. This movement is possible because we know that the Lord is like a shepherd who goes before us (40:11 and Psalm 23).

- In my life, when have I felt a "comfort" that came from God?
- What people around me need words of comfort?
- How can I "prepare the way of the Lord"? What helps me constantly to move from discouragement to hope? What words support me in this?

It is not only the body that needs healing, but above all the spirit. Jesus shows this by healing a paralyzed man who is brought to him. The man does not say a single word. Jesus takes the initiative and tells him, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

Jesus sees that the first thing the man needs is inner healing. Often our inner wounds paralyze us. The forgiveness that Jesus offers restores full human dignity to the paralyzed man, enabling him to "get up" and remain standing. Forgiveness is a liberation.

The paralyzed man did not expect to hear those words. He came for a physical cure and Jesus speaks about forgiveness. The scribes think that Jesus is blaspheming because, according to the faith of the people, only God had the authority to forgive sins. But Jesus speaks indirectly of himself as Son of man, an expression which can signify "a human being" (Ezekiel 2:1) but which can also be used to speak of a heavenly figure (Daniel 7:13). As Son of God who has become Son of man, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

Jesus helps us to discover another important reality: sin is not the cause of the paralysis. The God whom Jesus came to reveal is not a God who punishes. Concerning a man blind from birth Jesus had this to say: "Neither he nor his parents sinned" (John 9:3). Forgiven, healed, the paralyzed man stands up, takes his mat (a symbol of his illness) and walks out in the sight of all. Forgiveness frees us to create, even with our frailties, and to carry the frailties of others. In the face of such a brand-new reality, all we can do is exclaim with the crowd: "We have never seen anything like this!" (v. 13).

- The paralyzed man is carried by his friends. Who are those who have carried me, people who by their faith brought me to encounter God?
- What paralyzes me? Where do I sense the need for inner healing?
- Jesus said to the man, "Get up, take your mat and walk." How can I understand these words in my life today?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Nepal

The Newness of Christian Communities

One of the Taizé brothers who normally lives with the brothers in Bangladesh describes his recent visit to Nepal:

Travelling in Nepal is difficult nowadays. There are roadblocks everywhere and the army checks the buses and the other vehicles. There are not many foreign tourists to be seen except in Kathmandu. Nepal is a very religious country. You see Hindu temples everywhere. But the most spectacular in Kathmandu are the Buddhist temples. They are places of life, with many monks and pilgrims.

What is new in Nepal is the churches. The first small, local Christian communi-

ties started round 1950, first in Pokhara and then in and around Kathmandu. What is striking is the very deep and enthusiastic faith of many of the Christians. Often the prayer services are very moving because of the strong participation of the people and the beautiful, rhythmic singing. Most of the Christians are young: young people, and young families with children. In Kathmandu some of the churches are very big, with space for 1000 or 1500 people. Often they are full to overflowing. Everywhere you see also smaller churches or house churches. There is a lot of stress on religious instruction.

The newness and the enthusiasm of the Christian communities are surprising. There are perhaps a million Christians in Nepal today. What's amazing, too, are the different approaches of the

churches. The Catholics, for example, put great emphasis on schools and dispensaries, while some of the others put more stress on outreach programs. Much could be done to discover how complementary these approaches are and in fact many attempts are made to try to bring them together. When I was in Kathmandu, I had the privilege of taking part in a small gathering of people from different churches, both Catholic and Protestant. The meeting took place in the oldest Protestant church in Kathmandu, the Putali Sadak Church, which was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary.

The whole church was beautifully decorated and we sang Nepalese songs, prayed, listened to a Bible reading. Two people spoke briefly about the need they felt as Christians to work for more unity. Then we divided into groups to reflect

Taizé brothers in Dakar, Senegal

One of the brothers writes of how, since 2003, it has become possible to "move around without disturbing the priority of our commitment in the neighbourhood where we live... within the past year we have been able to visit neighbouring countries to Senegal: Mali, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, and slightly farther away: Togo and Benin". Another shares his experience of "visiting 'street schools' where recently we have started professional training activities for young people..."

<http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgafr.htm>

Meetings in Japan

During the April-May visit to Japan this year, there have been meetings and prayers in places, from Nagasaki in the South to Sendai in the North. "It was really a very meaningful start to the visits this year at the Minoshima Pastoral Center in Fukuoka; it is a place where they welcome young people who are in rehabilitation after drug addiction..."

<http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgjap.htm>

Meeting in El Alto, Bolivia

From 30 April to 3 May a pilgrimage of trust meeting was held in El Alto, Bolivia. After months of preparation, young people from El Alto and La Paz, the Bolivian capital, were joined by others from various parts of the country, from Chile and from even farther afield. Many of the songs used in the prayers were in Aymara.

<http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgbol.htm>

Australia: Pilgrimage in daily life

How to pray in daily life? In Sydney and Melbourne, some of those interested in this question came together for a time of prayer on three successive days: at breakfast time, noon, and just after work. Afterwards they could have the evening meal in silence. In Sydney and Adelaide, some decided actually to set out on foot, to walk from church to church, for a whole day, and so to experience a "pilgrimage in daily life" in one section of their city.

<http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgaus.htm>

Travel to Taizé by bus

A new bus service from Poland to Taizé has been announced. The company, with a long experience of pilgrimages, offers special rates for young adults who wish to spend a week in Taizé. Similar regular bus services exist between several countries and Taizé, every weekend, for the greater part of the year.

<http://www.taize.fr/shared/buscontz.htm>

on the theme: "Bind us together, Lord" - What kind of good things do I see in other churches? How can we come closer together?

There are Christians in Nepal who have suffered very much for their faith. Most of the villages can only be reached by walking. It can take several days or even a week or more to reach some of them. Yet even in these faraway villages you often find Christians. It is like a miracle the way in which the Gospel has spread throughout the whole of Nepal in just fifty years. Now is the time of deepening the faith, of reflecting, of coming together. So much can be received when people come together to share their inspiration.

Timor

A Future of Peace and Trust

"The most obscure and humble people can play a part in bringing about a future of peace and trust." (Letter 2004) As he was leaving East Timor, one of the brothers wrote: "These words undoubtedly find an echo in many of the young people I have met here over these last few days. So many of them feel powerless in the present situation. While many continue to believe that the actual president is the only person who can hold the country together, the difficulties facing the country are enormous. To take just one example: the needs in terms of education. So many young people want to study and that means they no longer wish to work in the fields. The result is that they come into the city to find work or study but do not find either. This accounts for the large number of young men standing around idle in the streets. At the same time, the plantations are getting poorer; coffee plantations that used to export have now lost their vitality. At the end of my stay, we had a weekend meeting for young people from several cities and from several parishes in the capital, Dili."

Philippines

An Incredible Generosity

"You have just completed a visit to the Philippines: what struck you most this time?" The question was put to one of the brothers who has visited the country on a regular basis for several years. "I had meetings in Manila and in Malaybalay, on the southern island of Mindanao. Those who took part in the Malaybalay weekend were young animators engaged either in diocesan youth ministry or in campus ministry. Most of them are working full time, and some even have two full time jobs - youth ministry and another full-time

occupation. Their generosity is incredible and for them it seems to be so 'obvious' to live in this way. Often, they do not have a salary, just enough to pay their transport to get home again. They are very aware of belonging to a country where the majority of people are under twenty-one. They see very clearly that young people have a vital role to play for the future. And right now, their big preoccupation is the presidential election and the campaign that is in full swing. The polls show that the outcome is far from clear and this causes much anxiety. The peso has dropped in value and this trend could continue, leading to violence, depending on the election results."

Letter from Taizé

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